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February 18, 1963

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**To: G - U. Alexis Johnson**

**From: S/AL - Llewellyn E. Thompson**

**Subject: Possible Soviet Reaction to Low-level Flights Over Cuba.**

It is impossible to make a prediction of Soviet reaction to low-level flights over Cuba with any degree of confidence. Much would depend, for example, upon the reaction of Castro. Also, much would depend upon the frequency and location of such flights. Since the Soviets have tacitly accepted our need for high-level surveillance, I should think they would not be disposed to take a strong position against very infrequent low-level flights if it were clear that these fitted into the context of our need for intelligence to protect our security. By this I would have in mind one or two flights per month. If the flights took place in sparsely settled areas, and would therefore be known to relatively few Cubans, I should think the reaction of Castro and the Soviets would be relatively mild. If, however, there were more frequent flights, and if they were of such nature that they were generally known throughout Cuba, I should think there would be strong reaction from Castro, who would probably inform the Soviets that he intended to attempt to shoot planes engaged in such flights, and he would probably demand that the Soviets fire upon our high-level flights with their surface-to-air missiles. If Castro should make such a demand in the case of infrequent flights over unpopulated areas, I believe the Soviets would refuse to use their SAMs and might even tell Castro that if he attacked our planes, the Soviets would pull out their troops.

On the other hand, if our flights were of such nature as to be considered provocative, I think most likely Soviet reaction would be campaign in U. N. and elsewhere against such flights.

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and if such campaign appeared to receive wide support in public opinion outside the United States, Soviets might be prepared to assist Castro in firing upon our planes.

Should Soviets be compelled by their unwillingness to become engaged in Cuba to withdraw, or if we should use force as a result of Soviet/Cuban attacks on our planes, I think it quite probable that Soviets would take strong measures elsewhere, the most likely place being Berlin. The most difficult form of action to deal with would be measures directed solely against United States forces in Berlin as this would put great strain upon Western Alliance.

I think, at some stage, we can anticipate that Soviets may offer to withdraw their troops if we will cancel economic measures directed against Cuba.

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